

Dear Honorable Representatives,

My name is Terri Henrizi and I come before you today both as a parent of a young person with special needs and as the Education Coordinator of a Statewide Family Organization serving families of children and youth with severe mental health challenges.

As a parent, I know first hand the feeling of desperation that comes when struggling to access the services and supports your child needs to function, especially when so many critical supports are not accessible or covered by insurance.

Talking with other parents across the state through my work, I quickly realized I was not alone in my struggles and that many other families were in much more dire situations. I have met families across Michigan who have found themselves in bankruptcy, foreclosure and even jobless and homeless trying to fund mental health services for their children. I have heard countless horror stories of families who are unable to access even basic mental health services until their children's untreated mental health needs reach a crisis level that requires hospitalization, police intervention or the unthinkable happens and a young person decides it is easier to take their own life than to live the condition they cannot get help for. Other families, facing repeated barriers to help their kids decide that the only way to ensure their child will get the help they so desperately need is to give up custody in the hope that the child welfare system will provide necessary treatment. We cannot and should not allow this to be the reality for children & families in our state!

I am pleased to hear that the Michigan Legislature is aware of the struggles that many families face in accessing services and as a result are considering Health Care Coverage for children with Autism through Senate Bills 414, 415, and 981. I am concerned though, that children with mental health disorders are not receiving the same consideration and would like to see the bills amended to cover all children with brain disorders including those with autism and serious mental health challenges. As a parent and a professional who has worked with both children with severe mental health challenges and autism and their families I can assure you that their struggles to access and pay for adequate and sometimes even minimal care for their children and youth are similar.

Please be a champion for all of Michigan's children and families and amend the autism coverage bills to cover children with serious mental health challenges as well. All children deserve fair and equal insurance coverage! Thank you for your time and consideration,

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